

Introduction

Good Afternoon Honorable Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, Chairman of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety , Honorable Senators and Committee Members Ray Fonseca, Angel Bolques, Jr. Dwayne M. DeGraff, Alma Francis Heyliger, Javan E. James Sr., and Franklin D. Johnson; all non-committee members present in the Senate chambers; family, friends, and the general public viewing and listening locally as well as abroad.

I am Major General Kodjo S. Knox-Limbacker, The Adjutant General, and the Commander of the Virgin Islands National Guard (VING) serving at the discretion of the Commander and Chief of the Virgin Islands National Guard , the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. It is an honor and privilege to be present before this esteemed body for the first meeting of the year to discuss VINGs readiness to support Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today while members of the National Guard are deployed in combat operations around the globe, supporting Ukraine mission requirements, regaining warfighter readiness, engaged in State Partnership Programs (SPP), and planning and rehearsals response to snow storms, wildfires and hurricanes hazards that may arise. I look forward to answering your varied questions after articulating VINGs mission, vision, priorities for continued support to the territory while increasing readiness for our primary mission, which is to fight and win our nations wars. During my testimony, I will provide context of our operating environment, our responsibilities, and our priorities to sustain and improve operational readiness of the Virgin Islands National Guard. Continued support of the Office of The Adjutant General is essential to support the people of the Virgin Islands as directed by Governor Albert Bryan Jr.

Context

The Bottom Line Up Front: The Readiness of the Virgin Islands Army and Air Guard is at the highest level of readiness in over a decade.

VING has transformed into a ready, relevant, and responsive joint fully integrated into the Total Force operational requirements. VING continues to be a lethal, dual-role operational forces that is part of a larger operational reserve force for the Army and Air Force respectively. We have completed support to Office of the Governor Executive Security for all gubernatorial inaugural activities; we supported the Virgin Islands Police Department for St Croix Festival and St Thomas Carnival and St John festivities this past year. We were able to provide unprecedented support to

the U.S. Secret Service for President Biden, First lady PhD Jill Biden, family and other officials' vacation in St Croix over holidays. We continue to provide exceptional Funerals Honors for not only the Honorable Governors Doctor Roy L. Snyder and Dr. Turnbull but also other eligible Veterans throughout our community. The majority of this support came from 23rd Weapons of Mass Destruction and Civil Support Team, 73rd Army Band, 661 Military Police, Soldiers from the 786th CSSB, 104th Troop Command, and the 285th Civil Engineer Squadron,

Today, we have Soldiers from first of the 114th UH-72 Lakota helicopter Detachment deployed along the US Border in support port of Homeland Security requirements. Our Airmen are completing pre-deployment training for upcoming missions to the Middle East in support of U.S. Central Command. Our Soldiers from the 786th Combat Sustainment and Support Battalion, 610th Water Purification and 640th Field Feeding are preparing for overseas deployments to Guyana in support of U.S. Southern Command Tradewinds Exercise. This will be in conjunction with our Caribbean and Latin American partner nations. Additionally we have members serving on active-duty tours at the National Guard Bureau Ina Arlington, Virginia, West Point Military Academy, and Fort Benning, Georgia. Beyond these locations, service members are in the training pipeline at military installations across the nation, while support joint readiness training exercises here in the territory.

With more than 440,000 service members, our nation's National Guard include 54 States, Territories and the District of Columbia make up 20% of the joint force, is larger than the US Marine Corps, and is only second in size to the United States Army's active duty force. With 334,575 Soldiers, the Army Guard provides 39% of the Army's operational force, while the Air Guard with 108,100 Airmen makes up 30% of the Air Force operational force. The National Guard's primary mission is to fight and win our nations war, while serving a secondary purpose of defending the homeland by responding to all hazards and crises in our State/Territory within our authorities.

Domestic Operations Support:

1. DSCA – VING supported the state funeral of the late Honorable Governor Turnbull and rendered funeral honors for the late Honorable Governor Schneider.

2. DSCA – VING provided material assistance to seven (7) agencies as part of our White House mission support during President Biden’s visit in January 2023.
3. DSCA – Other support included the Gubernatorial Inauguration Mission Support and the VIPD’s Cruzan Christmas Festival Support. VING is scheduled to participate in multiple local and national level training exercises in preparation for its continued support of Domestic operations. This year we will exercise our domestic response at the national level when we participate in New Orleans’ All Hazards Coordination Workshop March 13-17, 2023.

Federal Operations Support:

1. Detachment 1, Delta Company, 1st of the 114th AV Regiment- Mission: Successfully deployed and are exceeding the standards in providing protection requirements on the Southwest Border IOT enhance DHS / CBP mission capabilities. 631st Engineers, is poised to receive its Notification of Sourcing (NOS) for a deployment to Horn Africa. In its preparation for deployment, 631st training has provided incidental benefits to some of our local agencies. Benefactors have been the Department of Education as well as VIPD.
2. All VING units successfully conducted Annual Training and IDT requirements in the preceding year. We achieved and surpassed the Army standards of 85% for weapons qualification and poised to do so in the upcoming year. Among these training successes were the 73rd Army Band performing at the Veterans Fest, Hattiesburg Town Square Park, Hattiesburg, MS on 21 May 2022 as well as during the Memorial Day activities at Camp Shelby, MS County War Museum on 27 May 2022. This unit continues to be our ambassadors with both local and national performances. This unit has been nominated to perform, later this year, for the 30th Anniversary State Partnership Program (SPP) event in DC, hosted by the Chief, National Guard Bureau (CNGB).
3. Our units are performing in national level exercises: Vibrant Response 23 - HHC, 786th CSSB on 17 April – 21 May 2023 to conduct Joint Reception, Staging, Onward Movement (JRSOI) and establish Command and Control for seven (7) Combat Support company sized logistics organizations (Camp Atterbury-Muscatatuck, Indiana). Tradewinds 23 - 610th Quarter Master Company is prepared to deploy on 14-28 July 2023 to establish water purification and distribution operations, in support of Tradewinds 23 exercise,

Georgetown, Guyana. 640th Quarter Master Detachment will deploy in the same period and location to provide field-feeding support for 600 personnel at base camp and remote training areas.

Counter Drug

Virgin Islands National Guard (VING) Counterdrug (CD) Program provided Investigative Analysts to support local and federal law enforcement agencies in their continuous efforts to destroy dismantle and disrupt illicit drug trafficking organizations. This support has contributed to numerous cocaine seizures and marijuana eradication efforts totaling over \$92 million. The Drug Demand Reduction Outreach section provided presentations to a combination of over 5500 adults and youths that was focused on drug abuse or addiction and alcohol abuse affecting the VI communities. The VING will continue with its partnership with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and their Prevention initiatives, which included a collaboration of Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs), the Department of Health, Virgin Islands Police Department, and the Virgin Islands Counterdrug Program

23rd Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Team (WMD CST):

The 23rd Weapons of Mass Destruction - Civil Support Team provides support to civil authorities at domestic incident sites. Significant near term contributions of the 23rd WMD-CST include:

1. Continued partnership with VI Department of Health, regarding COVID preparedness,
2. Worked with FBI and US Secret Service to support the President of the United States (POTUS) New Year's 2023 visit to St. Croix,
3. Assisted VITEMA and FEMA to create potential industrial chemical release hazard scenario, used by FEMA, to request additional financial resources from the federal government for territory preparedness,
4. Assisted in conduct of Honorable Governor Wesley Turnbull Funeral and other executive events attended by distinguished guests,
5. Assisted various agencies, to include Department PNR, EPA, VIFD, to advise Limetree Refinery, in its effort to reopen operations safely,

6. Provided support to the Governor's Executive Security Unit and other first responders (VI Police Department and VI Fire and Emergency Service) agencies, for the Governor's State of the Territory Address, swearing in of Territory Senators, and several community based, highly populated carnival and festival season events, occurring on St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix respectively.

2023 Hurricane Season

The VING continues to maintain a heightened state of readiness in the event of mobilization for wartime or Territorial Active Duty (TAD) support of local emergency response operations. This is particularly heightened during every hurricane season. As a part of these efforts, we are actively engaged in exercising our response and recovery posture. We have scheduled our annual All Hazards Coordination Workshop for March 2023 and continue to strengthen our relationships between Department of Defense (DOD), local and federal partners. This serves to ensure a shared understanding of both the Territory's capabilities and shortfalls. Among the proposed discussion points will be Point of Distribution (POD) planning, emergency medical evacuation and Immediate Response Team planning and placement.

Closing

I want to thank this legislative body for the support you continue to provide to our men and women in uniform the past supporting our Veterans, currently supporting those in uniform and for future support with new initiatives to recruit and retain or young men and women from our territory in our Army and Air National Guard.